

GAO

Walter D. Rosten, Chairman, Subcommittee
on Air Transportation of Deregulation,
and Policy Committee on Small
Business, House of Representatives

August 1991

AIR TRAVEL

Passengers Could Be Better Informed of Their Rights



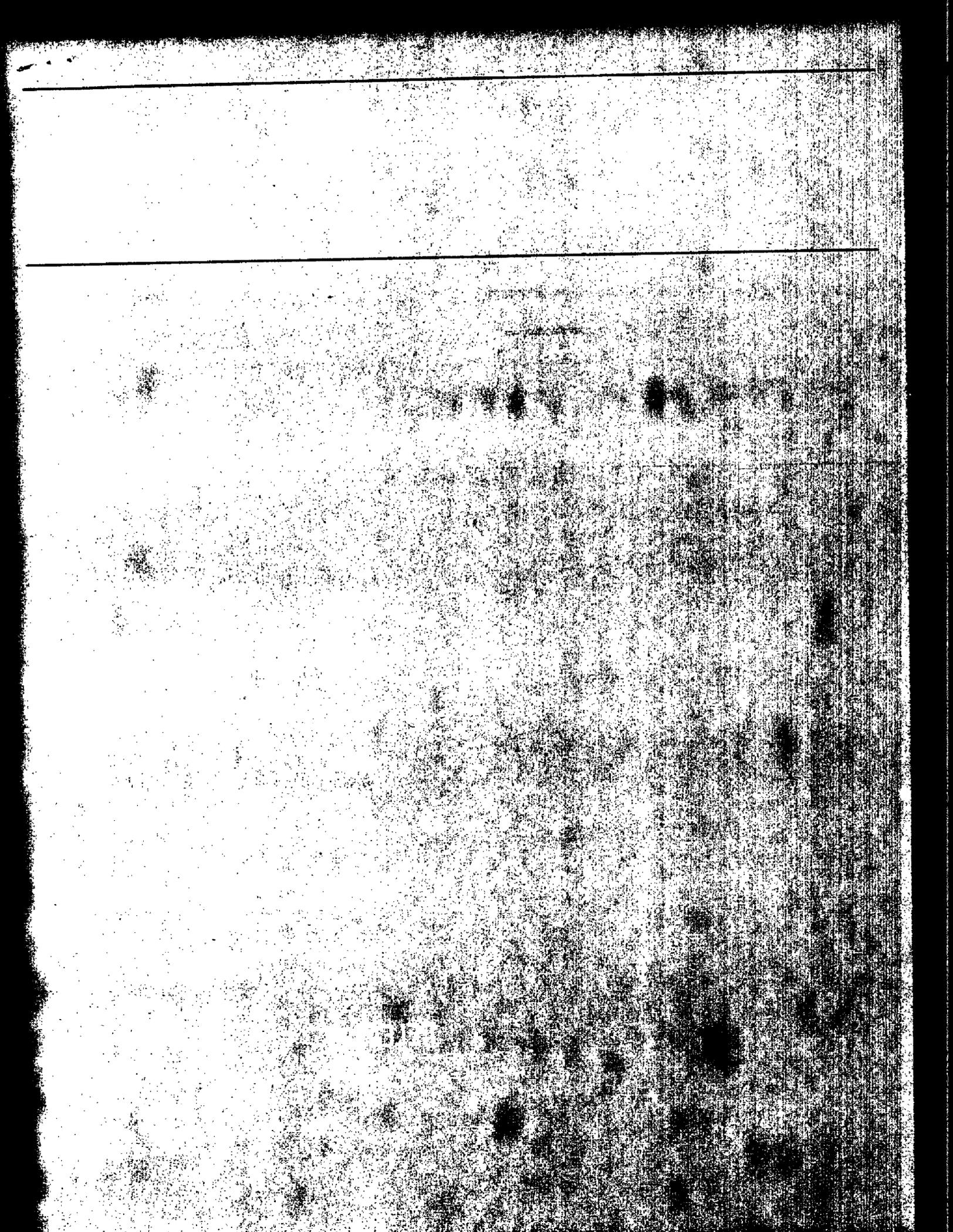
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Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division

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August 12, 1991

The Honorable Dennis E. Eckart
Chairman, Subcommittee on Antitrust,
Impact of Deregulation, and Ecology
Committee on Small Business
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As you requested, we examined the rights of airline passengers when they encounter problems with lost or damaged baggage; compensation to passengers when they are "bumped" (denied boarding) because of an overbooked flight; and services provided to passengers when a flight is delayed, cancelled, or diverted. These passenger rights are governed by Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations and by airlines' rules and policies as contained in their "contracts of carriage"—the airlines' statements of the terms and conditions under which they agree to transport passengers. Our objectives were to address the following questions:

- What passenger rights are provided by DOT regulations or airlines' contracts of carriage, and how easy are these rights to understand?
- What efforts do airlines and DOT make to disclose these rights, and how adequate is this disclosure?
- What do DOT's complaint data show about problems concerning passenger rights, and how does DOT use the data to highlight problems and target enforcement efforts?

Results in Brief

DOT regulations explicitly specify passenger rights to compensation for lost baggage and denied boarding. For other passenger concerns—such as services to passengers when flights are delayed, cancelled, or diverted—DOT regulations are silent. Major airlines' contracts of carriage parallel DOT's specific requirements, but they vary in their provisions for rights that regulations do not cover. For example, some airlines' contracts have detailed rules on services to be provided to passengers whose flights are delayed, while others are vague or silent on the subject. We found no support among airline, DOT, or consumer group officials for greater standardization of these services.

A passenger's ticket represents the contract of carriage between the airline and the passenger. DOT regulations permit airlines to incorporate key elements of their contracts in passenger tickets without stating the full

text. The full text is "incorporated by reference" in the ticket and must be made available to the passenger upon request. Although airlines generally meet these requirements, passengers still may not be well informed of their rights and obligations. According to airline officials, few passengers ever ask to see the contracts. Also, the contracts' terms and conditions are often complex and difficult to understand. DOT has published an information booklet to better inform passengers about their rights, but the booklet needs to be updated and made more widely available.

DOT's complaint data base has shown a decline in consumer complaints filed against U.S. airlines, from a high of about 41,000 in 1987 to about 7,700 in 1990. DOT officials attributed the drop to service improvements (resulting in part from DOT's public dissemination of on-time performance data and from its enforcement activity, and in part from service competition among carriers) and to more realistic customer expectations. DOT uses its complaint data to identify patterns of unfair or deceptive airline practices for which further investigation might be warranted. During the past 3 years, as complaints have decreased, DOT has not identified any major passenger rights issues warranting enforcement action, although some consumer protection investigations are underway. DOT publishes a monthly report ranking airlines by their totals of reported consumer complaints, flight delays, cases of mishandled baggage, and denied boardings due to overbooking. Airline officials said that they pay a great deal of attention to DOT's monthly report and that they have placed more emphasis on customer relations in recent years than they had in the past.

Background

Under federal law DOT is the primary agency responsible for airline consumer protection. It has broad authority to issue consumer protection regulations and to investigate and prosecute unfair and deceptive airline practices. It is also responsible for receiving and resolving consumer complaints and maintains a data base on the complaints it receives. On the basis of complaints from consumers, competitors, or state officials, DOT investigates and prosecutes airlines for patterns of unfair or deceptive practices.¹

¹Our earlier report, Airline Competition: DOT's Implementation of Airline Regulatory Authority (GAO/RCED-89-93, June 23, 1989), provides additional information on the organization and staffing of DOT's Office of Consumer Affairs.

Provisions of Contracts of Carriage Parallel Those of DOT Rules

DOT has issued the following regulations on baggage liability limits and compensation for denied boarding due to overbooking:

- The baggage regulation (14 C.F.R. part 254) prohibits airlines from setting liability limits for loss, damage, or delay in delivery of a passenger's baggage at an amount less than \$1,250 for each passenger. The \$1,250 limit applies to domestic flights only; for international travel, other limits apply.
- The overbooking regulation (14 C.F.R. part 250) requires airlines to solicit volunteers for denied boarding due to overbooking, establish boarding priority rules, and compensate passengers who are involuntarily denied boarding. The regulation does not require compensation for voluntarily denied boarding. Most major airlines offer vouchers or free trips to those who volunteer to take another flight. The regulation also details the amount of compensation and the conditions for receiving it. For example, for a passenger involuntarily denied boarding, airlines must pay 200 percent of the value of the passenger's one-way fare, up to a maximum of \$400, if the passenger will be delayed for more than 2 hours and half that amount if the airline provides comparable transportation that allows the passenger to arrive within 2 hours of the planned arrival time. No compensation is required if the delay is less than 1 hour. To be eligible for compensation, passengers must comply with airlines' rules on ticketing, reconfirmation, and check-in. The airline is not required to pay the compensation if the overbooking occurs because the airline has substituted a smaller aircraft for the scheduled aircraft for operational or safety reasons.

All major airlines' contracts of carriage parallel DOT regulations on baggage and overbooking rules. Overall, the incidence of reported baggage mishandling and denied boarding is relatively low. For example, between January 1, 1990, and September 30, 1990, the rate of mishandled baggage reports (delayed receipt as well as losses) was about 7 per 1,000 passengers, and the rate of cases of involuntarily denied boarding was about 1 case per 10,000 passengers.

Contracts of Carriage Vary in Areas of Passenger Rights That Are Not Regulated

Except in cases covered by its regulations, DOT generally lets airlines set their own terms and conditions under which they agree to transport passengers. In their contracts of carriage, airlines set their own rules covering such matters as time requirements for reporting lost or damaged baggage. The time requirements vary from airline to airline. For example, the deadline for reporting lost or damaged baggage ranges from 4 hours to 24 hours, and the deadline for filing written claims

ranges from 21 days to 45 days. (See app. III for a comparison of these time requirements.) Airlines also have their own rules covering such other matters as purchasing additional insurance coverage for valuable baggage and the exclusion of certain articles (money, jewelry, and cameras, for example) from liability.

DOT does not require airlines to compensate (or provide amenities and services to) passengers whose flights are delayed, cancelled, or diverted. All major airlines' tickets or contracts of carriage state that the airlines are not liable for failing to operate a flight on schedule or for changing the schedule of any flight. DOT believes this is appropriate because, unlike most other business activities, airline flights are uniquely susceptible to such safety factors as weather and mechanical problems. The contracts state that when a flight is delayed, the airline will make its best efforts to rebook the passenger on the first available flight to the passenger's destination; most contracts say the airline will use another carrier's flight if the airline is unable to provide its own transportation acceptable to the passenger. The contracts also say the airlines will refund the ticket price if so requested.

Although the airlines' contracts of carriage disclaim liability for failing to operate a flight on schedule, many airlines' contracts grant certain amenities and services (meals, hotel accommodations, or telephone calls) to passengers whose flights are cancelled or delayed. Each airline has its own policy, however, and the contracts of the major airlines vary significantly on the amenities and services to be provided. Some contracts are very specific about what services they will provide in specific circumstances, while others are either vague or silent on the subject. (See table 1.)

Table 1: Amenities and Services for Delayed or Diverted Airline Passengers

Airline	Refund of ticket	Transfer of ticket to another airline	Amenities/services if delayed 4 hours or longer ^a	Amenities/services if diverted to unscheduled airport ^a
America West	Yes	Yes	Hotel ^b Meals Telephone	Hotel ^b Meals Telephone
American	Yes	Yes	Not stated	Hotel
Continental	Yes	Not stated	Meals Telephone	Hotel ^b Meals Telephone
Delta	Yes	Yes	Hotel Meals ^c Telephone	Hotel Meals ^c Telephone
Northwest	Yes	Yes	Meals ^c Telephone ^c	Hotel Meals ^c Telephone ^c
PanAm	Yes	Yes	Not stated	Hotel
Southwest	Yes	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated
TWA	Yes	Yes	Not stated	Hotel
United	Yes	Yes	Not stated	Hotel
USAir	Yes	Yes	Not stated	Not stated

^aHotel is for 1 night when the delay is expected to exceed 4 hours between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. (10 p.m. and 4 a.m. for America West). Some airlines' contracts of carriage specify telephone service when the delay exceeds 2 hours.

^bNot provided if delay or diversion is due to weather or air traffic control delay.

^cFirst-class passengers only.

No Support for Greater Uniformity on Amenities and Services

The variations in contracts on amenities and services do not necessarily translate into real differences in airline practices. Airline officials we visited—at American, Continental, Northwest, and Southwest—told us they do not limit their amenities and services to those specified in the contracts of carriage. They have instructed their agents at airports to use the contracts of carriage as guidelines but to do whatever is reasonable to meet the needs of passengers. They do not favor any uniform standards on amenities and services because (1) the circumstances surrounding each flight problem are different, (2) many passengers prefer lower fares over more amenities/services, and (3) airlines need the flexibility to take care of the individual needs of passengers.

DOT officials told us that the differences in airline contracts relating to amenities and services do not create problems for consumers. They believe it is in the best interest of consumers to let airlines compete on the basis of services as well as fares. When we analyzed DOT's complaint

data to determine to what extent passengers complain about amenities and services provided by airlines, we found that passengers are more likely to complain when an airline fails to inform them adequately about delays than when it fails to provide amenities and services. For example, in 1990 there were 2,761 complaints about flight problems (delays, cancellations, and diversions) against major airlines. Of these, 25 percent involved misinformation or the lack of information given by the airline about delays, while 7 percent concerned dissatisfaction with amenities and services.

Officials representing airline passenger organizations also did not raise concerns about amenities and services. The Chief Executive Officer of the Air Passenger Association of North America, which represents about 110,000 frequent air travelers, said his members would prefer low fares over free meals or free hotel accommodations. He said that providing more amenities and services would not relieve passenger frustration over trip disruptions caused by flight problems, and he does not favor DOT regulations on amenities and services. Officials at the Aviation Consumer Action Project, a nonprofit consumer organization, also said they do not believe that regulations governing amenities and services would benefit passengers.

Passengers Are Likely to Be Uninformed About Their Rights

A passenger's ticket represents the contract of carriage between the airline and the passenger. Like any contract, the ticket would normally contain the full text of the agreement between the parties. However, because the full contractual language is lengthy, federal law allows airlines to include some contractual terms in the ticket, while incorporating the rest by reference, with the actual text being printed separately. If an airline chooses not to include the full text of the contract in the ticket, it must make a copy of any portion of the contract not printed in the ticket available for public inspection at airports and ticket offices and provide copies to passengers upon request.

Our review of airline tickets showed that while airlines print the key terms of their contracts in the ticket (or on the ticket jacket), the disclosure may not be very effective. All tickets include the rules on airline liability limits for baggage, overbooking of flights, and check-in requirements. However, the print on some tickets is too small to be read easily, and some rules are written in complex language that is difficult to understand.

Although airlines generally comply with DOT's requirement to make contractual terms available for public inspection, passengers are likely to have difficulty gaining access to the contracts. During our field work, we visited seven airport ticket offices of six airlines to check the availability of the contracts for public inspection. Most agents at the airports were unfamiliar with the contracts of carriage and had to refer us to their supervisors. Although the supervisors were able to produce a copy of the contracts for our inspection, one supervisor took almost 30 minutes to find a copy. All said they seldom received requests from passengers to inspect their contracts.

Passengers may also encounter some problems in obtaining a copy of contracts from airlines. During our review, we asked all major airlines to send us a copy of their contracts. Some took more than a month and required several follow-up telephone calls and written requests before they responded. Airline officials we visited told us they had few requests for the contracts; one official estimated that 20 requests were the most the airline received in a given month.

Passengers who try to read the fine print on their tickets are likely to have some difficulty understanding it, and the detailed contracts of carriage are even more difficult to comprehend. The major airlines' contracts, which range in length from 16 to 43 pages, contain complex rules written in language not easily understandable by the general public. For example, in reference to the amount of denied boarding compensation specified within it, the contract of one major airline states in part:

Subject to the provisions of paragraph E)1) above, [the airline] will tender liquidated damage in the amount of 200% (100% but not more than USD [U.S. dollars] 200.00 for sectors operated by [the Airline] Connection [as defined in Rule 394]) of the sum of the values of the passenger's remaining flight coupons of the ticket to the passenger's next stopover, or if none, to his/her destination, but not more than USD 400.00.

We used two widely available computer programs—Right Writer and Grammatik IV—to rate the readability of the tickets and selected sections of the contracts of all major airlines. We selected sections of the contracts that discuss the liability limit on baggage, denied boarding, and failure to operate on schedule. These programs evaluate the complexity of words and sentences and rate the readability of the text according to the educational level needed to easily understand it. These programs rated some part of the tickets and all sections of the contracts

we tested as needing more than a 4-year college education to understand.

Thus, despite the disclosure on the tickets and the availability of the full texts of the contracts of carriage, many passengers are probably not knowledgeable about airline rules and passenger rights. Consumer representatives said that they had received many complaints (or inquiries) from passengers who misunderstood or did not know what to expect from an airline when they encountered flight or baggage problems. Officials at the Aviation Consumer Action Project said they believed consumer information is the biggest void in the protection of airline passengers. They published a booklet, Facts and Advice for Airline Passengers, that helps passengers better understand the rules and regulations affecting air travel. The editor of another publication, Consumer Reports Travel Letter, said that it continually publishes articles to educate its readers about airline rules and passenger rights. The editor believes that most passengers are not adequately informed by the airlines.

DOT officials said that passengers often ask DOT offices for information about airline rules and passenger rights. According to DOT's records, almost 1,200 such requests—about 10 percent of all inquiries—were received in 1990. In addition, DOT officials believe that many consumer complaints were caused by passengers' misunderstanding of their rights (or the limitations of their rights)—although DOT does not keep track of complaints on this basis.² To educate passengers about their rights and responsibilities as air travelers, DOT published an information booklet, Fly-Rights, which DOT officials said they use to help answer about 40 percent of consumer complaints. The officials estimate that DOT has distributed about 60,000 copies of this booklet since it was last revised in 1985. The booklet is also available for sale through the Government's Consumer Information Center, which has distributed about 130,000 copies since 1985. According to an Air Transport Association survey and data from the Bureau of the Census, about 65 million adults were airline passengers in 1989.

DOT's booklet is easy to read, especially compared with the contracts of carriage. It explains passenger rights, provides tips on how to minimize travel problems, and tells where to file complaints. However, a number of changes in the airline industry and in DOT rules have occurred since

²DOT classifies complaints by type of problem (such as flight problems, baggage loss, etc.) but not by cause of problem.

the booklet was last updated in 1985. For example, in 1987 DOT issued a new rule requiring airlines to report to DOT the numbers of delayed flights and cases of mishandled baggage each month. Since then, DOT has been ranking airlines on those service-quality indicators. In addition, the same rule requires airlines to display the on-time percentage of most flights in the computerized reservation system so that passengers can have convenient access to this information. The booklet contains no information on these developments. An updated, widely available booklet could help clarify passenger rights (and the limitations on their rights) and minimize complaints caused by lack of information.

DOT Uses Its Complaint Data Base to Identify Serious Problems

DOT's Office of Consumer Affairs is responsible for receiving and resolving consumer complaints. Complaints are classified into 12 major types of problems.³ Within each category, separate codes are used to identify more specific problems. For example, within the category of flight problems, a complaint code differentiates a flight delay from a flight cancellation, a weather-related problem from a mechanical problem, and a passenger's dissatisfaction about amenities and services from an airline's failure to provide information.

DOT's complaint data since 1985 show that over half of consumer complaints are related to flight delays and baggage problems. Other major complaints include problems in obtaining refunds, mistakes or problems in making reservations or obtaining tickets, inadequate or poor services, and problems involving oversales (bumping). These six problems together account for over 85 percent of complaints. (See table 2.)

Table 2: Major Categories of Complaints Against U.S. Airlines, 1985-90

Categories	Percent of total complaints, by year					
	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Flight problems	27	32	44	41	39	39
Baggage	23	20	18	18	16	17
Refunds	16	14	8	8	10	9
Customer services	5	7	9	10	9	10
Ticketing and boarding	5	7	6	7	8	8
Overbooking	9	8	5	6	6	5
Other	15	12	10	10	12	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

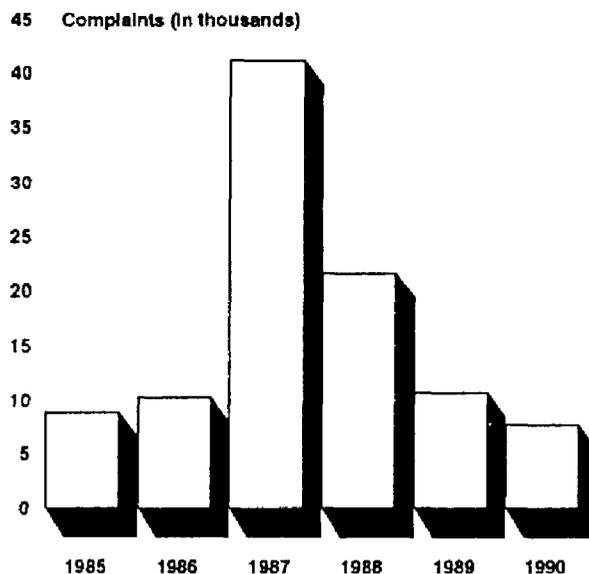
³The 12 categories are flight problems, oversales, reservation/ticketing/boarding, fares, refunds, baggage, customer service, smoking, advertising, credit, tours or charters, and miscellaneous.

Airline officials we interviewed said the trends shown in DOT's data base are consistent with their own experience. Consumer representatives we interviewed also said DOT's data base is a good indicator of the types of problems that passengers are experiencing.

Consumer Complaints Filed With DOT Have Declined Steadily Since 1987

Consumer complaints filed with DOT against U.S. airlines increased sharply between 1985 and 1987, rising from about 8,800 in 1985 to about 41,000 in 1987. They have since steadily declined, to about 7,700 in 1990. (See fig. 1.)

Figure 1: Consumer Complaints Against U.S. Airlines, 1985-90



Source: DOT Office of Consumer Affairs.

According to DOT officials, consumer complaints peaked in 1987 because (1) many airline mergers occurred in 1987 and the consolidation of routes and schedules caused service disruption problems for many airlines and (2) at that time, some airlines were engaging in unrealistic flight scheduling and failing to make timely refunds. According to DOT officials, those problems have been corrected, and improved airline services, combined with reduced consumer expectations, have contributed to the recent decline in consumer complaints.

DOT Uses Complaint and Other Service Quality Data to Promote Passenger Rights

DOT's Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) uses its complaint data base to identify and investigate patterns of unfair or deceptive airline practices. Through the complaint resolution process, the staff in OCA's Consumer Affairs Division identify and code complaints involving potential violations of DOT regulations. The division periodically generates an internal report of those complaints and reviews the reports to identify trends and patterns of violations. If the complaint data indicate that an airline is engaged in a pattern of violations, the division sends the information to OCA's Investigation Division for closer review and, if further action is warranted, to the Office of Aviation Enforcement and Proceedings in DOT's Office of General Counsel.

DOT's records show that the majority of its investigative and enforcement actions occurred between 1986 and 1989. For example, in 1987 DOT reached settlement agreements with seven major airlines on more realistic flight scheduling practices and assessed several airlines and tour operators civil penalties (totaling over \$850,000) for violations of consumer regulations. From 1988 to the present, DOT conducted only a few enforcement actions against airlines, mostly for deceptive advertising. DOT officials explained the reduced activity as the result of fewer consumer complaints and the lack of patterns of violations identified from their reports of complaints with potential violation codes. We reviewed these reports and found that the number of complaints involving potential violations was 70 in 1989 and 75 in 1990. Most of these complaints alleged violations of rules on smoking and on accommodations for the handicapped, which are outside the scope of this review.

DOT's monthly Air Travel Consumer Report ranks major airlines by consumer complaints as well as by their performance on flight delays, mishandled baggage, and overbooking. (See app. II for excerpts of this report.) According to DOT officials, the publication of those service-quality indicators has forced airlines to improve their services in order to compete. Some airlines have been so concerned about their ranking on consumer complaints that they send staff to DOT each month to investigate complaints registered against their airlines and to seek ways to reduce complaints. Airline officials told us they pay great attention to DOT's monthly statistics on service quality and that, during the last few years, customer relations have become a high priority for the airlines.

Conclusions

Airline passengers are likely to be uninformed about their rights as air travelers, and many passenger complaints result from this lack of information. DOT has a booklet on passenger rights, but the booklet has not

been widely distributed, nor has it been updated since 1985. We believe DOT should update the booklet and distribute it more widely. One possible way to make it more widely available would be to display and distribute it at prominent locations at airports, such as ticket counters, boarding gates, or baggage claim areas. We believe that a wider distribution of an up-to-date booklet would make passengers more aware of the extent of and limitations to their rights and help passengers to choose an airline knowledgeably by taking into account the varying service levels offered by different airlines.

Recommendation to the Secretary of Transportation

We recommend that the Secretary of Transportation, as part of the effort to better inform passengers of the extent of and limitations to their rights, update the Department's consumer information booklet and explore options (such as airport distribution) for a wider distribution of the booklet.

In conducting our review we (1) examined DOT regulations and the contracts of carriage of 10 major airlines,⁴ (2) interviewed officials with DOT, the airline industry, and airline consumer groups, and (3) analyzed DOT's statistical data on consumer complaints. Appendix I contains further details of our objectives, scope, and methodology. Our review was conducted between September 1990 and February 1991 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As agreed with your office, we did not obtain formal agency comments on this report. We did, however, provide a draft copy of the report to DOT officials and received their informal oral comments. They generally agreed with the facts presented and the recommendation of the draft report. In fact, they plan to update the Fly-Rights booklet soon. However, they felt that the draft of the report they reviewed understated the extent to which the booklet had been circulated, and they provided us with additional data on its circulation. We incorporated these data, as well as a number of comments by DOT officials on technical matters, in the draft of the report.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after

⁴DOT defines major airlines as those having annual operating revenues greater than \$1 billion. As of February 1991, there were 10 major airlines: America West, American, Continental, Delta, Northwest, Pan Am, Southwest, TWA, United, and USAir.

the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Transportation, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties.

This report was prepared under the direction of Kenneth M. Mead, Director of Transportation Issues, who can be reached at (202) 275-1000. Other major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,



J. Dexter Peach
Assistant Comptroller General

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Figure

Figure 1: Consumer Complaints Against U.S. Airlines,
1985-90

10

Abbreviations

DOT	Department of Transportation
GAO	General Accounting Office
OCA	Office of Consumer Affairs
RCED	Resources, Community, and Economic Development Division

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

On October 23, 1990, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Antitrust, Impact of Deregulation, and Ecology, House Committee on Small Business, requested that we review the rights of airline passengers when they encounter problems such as having their baggage lost, being “bumped” from an overbooked flight (denied boarding), and being stranded by delayed, cancelled, or diverted flights. Specifically, we agreed to focus on the following questions:

- What passenger rights are provided by the Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations or airlines’ contracts of carriage, and how easy are these rights to understand?
- What efforts do airlines and DOT make to disclose these rights to passengers, and how adequate is this disclosure?
- What do DOT’s complaint data show about passenger rights problems, and does DOT use the data to highlight problems and target enforcement efforts?

To answer these questions, we reviewed DOT consumer protection regulations and interviewed officials in DOT’s Office of Consumer Affairs, Office of General Counsel, Office of Economics, and Office of Inspector General. We analyzed DOT data on consumer complaints, mishandled baggage, and denied boarding.

We reviewed airline passenger tickets (including ticket jackets, inserts, and handouts) and the contracts of carriage of all 10 major airlines—America West, American, Continental, Delta, Northwest, Pan Am, Southwest, TWA, United, and USAir. We interviewed officials at the headquarters of four major airlines—American, Continental, Northwest, and Southwest. These four airlines accounted for about 40 percent of domestic passengers enplaned in 1990. We also visited seven ticket offices of six airlines—Northwest at Washington National airport; Alaska, American, Delta, and United at Seattle-Tacoma airport; and TWA and Northwest at Minneapolis-St. Paul airport.

We discussed passenger rights issues with officials of three airline consumer organizations—the International Airline Passengers Association, the Airline Passengers Association of North America, and the Aviation Consumer Action Project. We also interviewed the editors of Consumer Reports Travel Letter and Frequent Flyer magazine and the author of an air travel article published in Money magazine.

Our review was conducted between September 1990 and February 1991 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Excerpts From DOT's Air Travel Consumer Report

Table II.1: Overall Percentage of Reported Flight Operations Arriving on Time, by Carrier (Mar. 1991)

Carrier	At 31 Reportable Airports		At All Reported Airports	
	Number of Airports Reported	Percent of Arrivals On Time	Number of Airports Reported	Percent of Arrivals On Time
American	31	86.8	115	86.9
USAir	30	83.6	125	84.9
Northwest	29	84.6	106	84.8
Alaska	5	83.8	30	83.3
Delta	31	80.2	131	81.0
Pan American	21	80.9	30	80.6
Continental	27	78.7	94	80.4
Midway	19	78.1	33	79.8
America West	19	72.9	55	74.6
TWA	29	74.2	73	74.6
Southwest	9	60.5	33	71.8
United	31	67.8	118	67.5
Total		79.1		80.0

Source: DOT.

Table II.2: Mishandled Baggage Reports Filed by Passengers (Jan. - Mar. 1991)

Jan.-Mar. 1991 Rank	U.S. Airlines	Net No. of Baggage Reports	Passengers	Reports Per 1,000 Passengers
1	Midway	6,861	1,410,763	4.86
2	Continental	41,248	8,178,137	5.04
3	Southwest	29,343	5,817,137	5.04
4	Pan American	9,664	1,855,140	5.21
5	American	84,063	15,360,309	5.47
6	USAir	79,806	13,930,600	5.73
7	Northwest	54,421	8,419,150	6.46
8	Alaska	8,191	1,202,143	6.81
9	Delta	118,256	16,717,514	7.07
10	United	91,200	12,578,211	7.25
11	TWA	33,592	4,537,145	7.40
12	America West	42,011	4,296,611	9.78
	Total	598,656	94,303,510	6.35

Note: Reports are for domestic passengers only. These are passenger reports of mishandled baggage, including those that did not subsequently result in claims for compensation. Some carriers have more comprehensive reporting systems than others. To allow for comparison, reports about courtesy tracers, voluntary separations, carry-on baggage, and double counts have been deducted from the baggage reports submitted by those carriers offering such services.

Source: DOT.

Appendix II
Excerpts From DOT's Air Travel
Consumer Report

Table II.3: Passengers Denied Boarding by Major/National U.S. Airlines (Oct.-Dec. 1990)

Oct.-Dec. 1990 Rank	U.S. Airlines	Denied Boardings (DBs)		Passengers Boarded	Involuntary DBs Per 1,000 Psgrs.
		Voluntary	Involuntary		
Majors					
1	United	11,200	347	13,172,680	0.26
2	American	27,541	535	18,455,657	0.29
3	Delta	6,894	776	15,734,642	0.49
4	Northwest	15,338	496	8,877,930	0.56
5	Eastern	6,655	263	4,656,111	0.56
6	USAir	22,509	2,295	14,698,995	1.56
7	Continental	16,744	2,057	8,600,434	2.39
8	Pan American	3,061	736	2,541,861	2.90
9	Southwest	6,385	1,460	4,830,731	3.02
10	TWA	8,757	2,052	4,889,805	4.20
11	America West	9,126	1,722	3,988,241	4.32
	Total Majors	134,210	12,739	100,447,087	1.27
Nationals					
1	Air Wisconsin	142	0	560,283	0.00
2	American Trans Air	0	0	59,434	0.00
3	Tower	0	0	49,815	0.00
4	Hawaiian	22	27	875,369	0.31
5	Alaska	1,608	257	1,320,089	1.95
6	Horizon	23	13	50,153	2.59
7	Midway	3,847	439	1,559,235	2.82
8	Markair	63	29	100,944	2.87
9	Aloha	0	575	1,142,320	5.03
10	Westair	0	1,460	586,402	24.90
	Total Nationals	5,705	2,800	6,304,044	4.44
	Grand Total	139,915	15,539	106,751,131	1.46

Note: Airlines are grouped according to annual operating revenues. Airlines are classified as Majors if they exceed \$1 billion in operating revenues. Nationals are airlines with operating revenues from \$100 million through \$1 billion.

Source: DOT.

Time Limits for Checking Baggage and Reporting and Filing Damage or Loss Claims

Airline	Minimum time before departure to check bags	Maximum time to report missing or damaged bags	Maximum time to file a written claim for loss	Maximum time to sue
America West	15 minutes ^a	4 hours	45 days	2 years
American	Varies by airport	Not stated	21 days	1 year
Continental	15 minutes	4 hours	45 days	2 years
Delta	Varies by airport	Not stated	21 days	1 year
Northwest	15 minutes	4 hours	45 days	2 years
Pan Am	Varies by airport	Not stated	45 days	2 years
Southwest	15 minutes	4 hours	21 days	1 year
TWA	Varies by airport	1 day	45 days	1 year
United	15 minutes	24 hours	45 days	2 years
USAir	Not stated	Not stated	45 days	2 years

^a20 minutes at specified airports.

Source: Contracts of carriage.

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Related GAO Products

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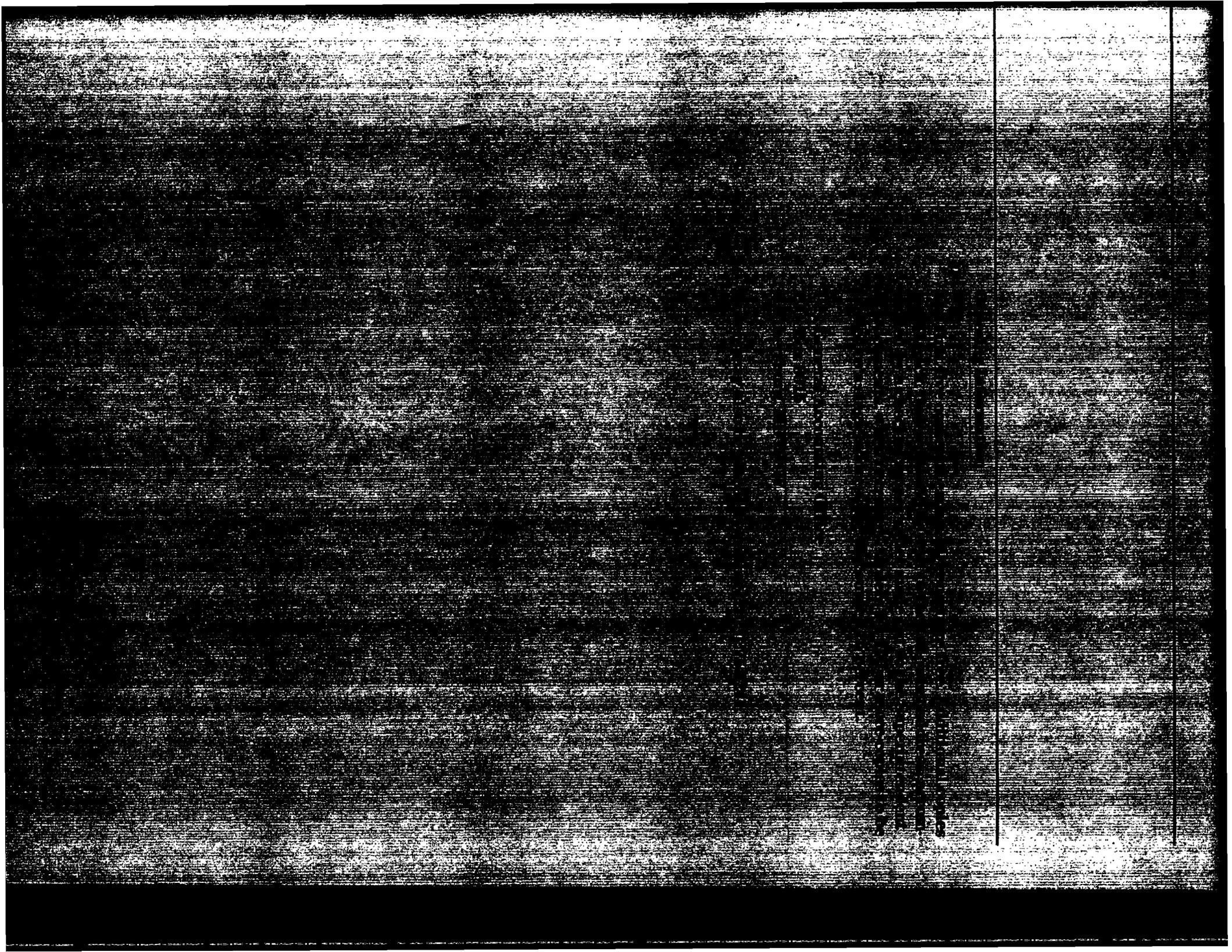
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